

ECA Update: February 2, 2015



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DOE Budget Request Released

ECA Staff
February 2, 2015

Today, the Obama Administration's FY 2016 Budget request was released, including the Department of Energy's request which can be found [here](#).

The Department of Energy (DOE) is requesting \$29.9 billion, \$2.5 billion above the FY2015 enacted level. Included in that is the request from the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) for \$12.6 billion, \$1.2 billion above the FY2015 level. The bulk of NNSA's spending request is for Weapons Activities to maintain the country's nuclear deterrent. That request is \$8.8 billion, \$667 above FY2015 levels. A further \$1.4 billion is being requested for naval reactors.

The budget request for Environmental Management (EM) came in at \$5.8 billion, some \$43 billion below last year's enacted total. According to DOE's proposal, "the Request includes \$248 million to maintain critical progress towards returning to normal operations, with a goal of establishing interim operations [at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant] in 2016." DOE's request also includes \$1.4 billion, \$202 million above FY2015 levels, to support the completion of the Waste Treatment Plant, retrieve of waste from 19 tanks, and efforts to amend the Consent Decree between DOE and Washington State.

Funding for each site can be found on page 48 of the DOE's request.

Carlsbad/WIPP - \$248M

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INL - \$366M
Oak Ridge - \$365M
Paducah - \$232M
Portsmouth - \$227M
Richland/Hanford - \$914M
River Protection - \$1.4B
Savannah River - \$1.3B
LLNL - \$1.3M
LANL - \$188M
Nevada - \$62M
SNL - \$2.5M

The Office of Legacy Management's request is \$154 million, about \$4.5 million below last year's request. Nuclear Energy's total request is more than \$907 million; \$74 million above last year's enacted funding levels. Further analysis will be available throughout the month!

Plan for a burn at Rocky Flats stirs lingering fears

High Country News

January 31, 2015

[LINK](#)

It takes a little more than 24,000 years for plutonium-239 to lose half of its radioactive energy. People's memories don't last as long, but can have their own burning energy when it comes to risks from nuclear-weapons plants.

Plans for a prescribed fire this spring in a corner of the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge - formerly the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant - have run into resistance from activists, former workers and new homeowners concerned about the health effects of burning potentially contaminated grasslands. But those worries are outdated and oversized, according to state and federal government managers, and ignore natural wildfire risks that could pose more severe problems.

Located between Denver and Boulder, the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant produced plutonium triggers for nuclear bombs beginning in 1952. An FBI raid in 1989 halted operations after finding evidence of illegal radioactive waste dumping, burning and storage across the 6,200-acre site.

Since then, government managers and contractors have spent \$7.5 billion cleaning up Rocky Flats: razing buildings, removing

radioactive materials and soils, and restoring other areas. The open and rolling landscape now encompasses a National Wildlife Refuge; it remains off-limits to people, and the hottest spots are still monitored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

As part of efforts to manage the lands today, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced plans for a prescribed burn on 701 acres in the southwest corner of the site last fall. The planned burn will help thin out invasive weeds and overgrown vegetation - before a natural wildfire occurs and scorches the area more severely.

"If we have a wildfire, it will be devastating," says David Lucas, Fish and Wildlife refuge manager. Erosion caused by a wildfire could move soil and materials from more contaminated areas and release airborne radiation.

Speaking to the Rocky Flats Stewardship Council, a panel of local government and other representatives, and a public audience on Jan. 26, Lucas said the construction of a major new housing and shopping development, Candelas, along the Flats' southern boundary has "induced" the burn plans. He added that the planned burn area has been tested and contamination is no higher than "background levels" found elsewhere. Managers and technicians who will carry out the work will take no extra precautions compared with other prescribed burns. The state of Colorado approved a smoke permit for the project.

But all that has done little to alleviate scrutiny and fears of locals. Long-time activists and former plant workers say the burn plans are reckless and the action could release plutonium locked in the soil and vegetation. Alternatives, such as using goats to graze overgrown areas (and then killing the potentially radioactive livestock), should have gotten more consideration, they say. Opponents also argue that a test burn in 2000 released much higher levels of airborne radiation and toxic smoke than the government has acknowledged.

"Is it appropriate to have a burn on a radionuclide-contaminated site?" asks Mickey Harlow, a retired water-quality analyst for the nearby town of Westminster. That's a national question for former nuclear sites across the West that are now being managed as wildlife areas and being surrounded by new development. "We have to err on the side of safety," says Harlow, who along with others are meeting with attorneys to consider actions to prevent the burn.

Following the past coverups and negligence at Rocky Flats - and considering the ongoing health problems of former workers - the enduring skepticism of government actions at Rocky Flats is no surprise. Harlow and many others contend the site's toxic legacy and the extent of contamination remains unknown or underestimated.

Many residents in nearby newly built developments in the towns of Superior, Broomfield and Arvada have now moved in, unaware of Rocky Flats' past. Homeowners and activists have organized to ensure that other potential residents are better informed of the fading history - and the uncertainty surrounding the former weapons facility.

In response to the heightened suspicions of residents, the Rocky Flats Stewardship Council has asked Fish and Wildlife to reconsider its plans, scheduled for the spring when conditions permit. But David Abelson, himself an energy-policy consultant for local governments, emphasizes that the council's opposition is rooted in citizens' concerns, not any specific health risks.

Containing radiation - and people's fears - is tricky business. Lucas, the refuge manager, understands the worries, but he says that while Fish and Wildlife also recognizes that prescribed fire wouldn't be appropriate across all of Rocky Flats, residents should understand that radioactive contamination isn't a ubiquitous threat - and choosing not to manage the expansive site brings its own dangerous consequences, including a possible wildfire spreading to more contaminated areas.

"We have to get past that," Lucas says. "We know the Flats will burn."

Goats offered as alternative for clearing area of plutonium

Associated Press

February 1, 2015

[LINK](#)

BOULDER, Colo. -- A goat herder who has a college degree in weed sciences told federal wildlife officials that she could eliminate the need for a possible 700-acre controlled burn at the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge by turning her goats loose there and eliminate concerns over spreading radioactive plutonium.

Lani Malmberg said it's unwise to burn land that has been exposed to the toxic metal, and she said her goats won't suffer any ill consequences.

The refuge was created in 2006 in the wake of the nuclear weapons site's closure, and a \$7 billion cleanup was finished in 2005. Concerns that a controlled burn there could put plutonium into the air prompted Boulder's Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center and surrounding communities to take a stance against that happening.

A spokesman for the Fish and Wildlife Service eight-state Mountain-Prairie regional office in Denver said it's the agency's current position that grazing is not an option at the Department of Energy weapons plant-turned-wildlife refuge because of a lack of fencing and staff.

Fish and Wildlife regional spokesman John Bryan said other options are being considered by the service at this time and no final decision has been made, the Boulder Daily Camera reported.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment on Jan. 20 issued a permit allowing for the burn in what is known as the South Woman Creek area at the southwestern edge of the refuge, near new housing developments.

Boulder City Councilwoman Lisa Morzell said officials are concerned that the animals would have to be euthanized, and there would be protests from animal rights people. She said those concerns are unfounded.

"Why would you have to euthanize them?" Morzell asked. "They are not used for milk or meat, they are used for grazing. And the individual that owns these goats is able to make a sufficient income that way. They are not intended for dairy or for meat."